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Feud over Iran deal heats up

State Dept. very critical of NSC role

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The State Department's stinging criticism Monday of the National Security Council's role in the Iran affair was the latest battle in Washington's longest-running turf war.

Feuding between the State Department, supposed to carry out foreign policy, and the 30-year-old NSC, charged with advising the president on national security, began with Henry Kissinger's days as NSC chief.

But the open recriminations, voiced Monday by Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead — who complained that State was not properly informed of the Iran caper — exceeded past criticism.

Besides Iran, Reagan's NSC reportedly has armed Nicaraguan rebels and waged a disinformation campaign against Libya's Moammar Gadhafi.

"This is a hell of a way to run either a railroad or a serious government," said MIT professor Lincoln Bloomfield, who was director of Global Issues on President Carter's NSC.

"The NSC is indispensable for quietly helping the president to coordinate policies ... but not to go into business for itself and bypass the rest of the government," said Bloomfield, who called the Iran deal "a travesty" of NSC's purpose.

NSC was created in 1947 and existed in the shadows of strong secretaries of State — like John Foster Dulles and Dean Rusk — until Kissinger became NSC chief in 1969.

Kissinger opened the door to China and negotiated the Vietnam peace accords.

"You have no idea how reminiscent this is of the Kissinger period," said former CIA deputy director Ray Cline, a professor at Georgetown University. "I suspect some of the people involved are Kissinger proteges or would-be Kissingers."

Cline said this affair is bound to damage the U.S. reputation with its allies abroad.

Kissinger later became a strong secretary of State. But after he departed, the feuds resumed: Under Carter there was Zbigniew Brzezinski against Cyrus Vance; and under Reagan, Richard Allen Alexander Haig, William Clark George Shultz, Robert McFarlane-Shultz and now John Poindexter-Shultz.

Thus, said Bloomfield, "this is not completely unprecedented. What is unprecedented is using the NSC to bypass the rest of the government."

The NSC is composed of the president, the NSC director, the secretaries of State and Defense and the CIA director. It has a \$4 million budget and a White House staff of about 100.